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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003144

SIPDIS

REL/GBR AUS

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SUBJECT: VICE PRESIDENT ABDEL MEHDI PLEDGES COOPERATION ON
CONSTITUTION AND SECURITY ISSUES

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford.
Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C/NF REL GBR AUS) SUMMARY. Vice President Abdel Mehdi told the Ambassador during their July 25 meeting that, in the negotiations on the constitution, all sides were upping their demands, making it difficult to reach a final consensus. Ambassador reiterated USG willingness to help a summit of political leaders to negotiate a final draft of the constitution. The Ambassador promised to consult with the Iraqi leadership and with the Vice President as the two nations consider the gradual drawdown of Coalition Forces. Abdel Mehdi suggested that a Status of Forces Agreement be discussed at a later date. Ambassador and Abdel Mehdi agreed that continued U.S.-Iraq cooperation is necessary for a peaceful and prosperous Iraq. END SUMMARY.

Lost In Translation

2. (C/NF REL GBR AUS) Ambassador, accompanied by DCM and PolCouns met with Vice President Abdel Mehdi on July 25. Abdel Mehdi began by discussing a translation problem with constitution ratification rules (the text of the referendum law uses "nakhibeen," which could be interpreted either as actual voters or as theoretical registered electors, vice "musawwateen," which would have clearly referred to actual voters). The controversy is whether the Iraqi constitution must be ratified by half of all the Iraqis who vote in the referendum, or by half of all registered Iraqi voters. Ambassador reiterated U.S. support for the former. Abdel Mehdi agreed that this was the better choice, and said the Presidency Council would issue a statement clarifying this language so that it clearly is understood to mean half of those voting only.

Constitutional Negotiations

3. (C/NF REL GBR AUS) Abdel Mehdi told the Ambassador that, in the negotiations on the constitution, all sides were upping their demands, making it difficult to reach a final consensus. The Deputy President mentioned that the July 21 draft the Shia had put forward basically was the Shia opening line. Abdel Mehdi and Ambassador agreed compromises would need to be reached and that all sides simply want to strengthen their positions by having as many bargaining chips as possible.

4. (C/NF REL GBR AUS) Ambassador inquired about a possible summit involving political leaders to help finalize decisions on a constitution. The dates most often mentioned are that the meeting in Baghdad would start around August 2 or 3. Abdel Mehdi agreed this meeting would be very useful. He commented that there is still a question about who among the Sunni Arabs to invite, as they have no obvious leadership.

Security Issues

5. (C/NF REL GBR AUS) Ambassador stressed to Abdel Mehdi that U.S. soldiers will be in Iraq only until Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) could "stand on their own." Both Abdel Mehdi and the Ambassador agreed that arrangements regarding the presence of Coalition/U.S. forces would need to be discussed. In response to Abdel Mehdi's expression of concern regarding conduct of Coalition forces in entering mosques, the Ambassador said that the U.S. military commanders have policies on the issue which could be reviewed.

Impact of the Sharm Al Sheikh Attacks

16. (C/NF REL GBR AUS) Speculating on the Egyptian reaction to the recent terrorist attacks at Sharm al Sheikh, DCM gave two possible scenarios: this attack could either galvanize the Mubarak and mobilize Egyptian action on a broad regional front to confront terror, including in Iraq, or Mubarak could turn inward and be even more resistant to building ties with the Iraqi government, out of concern at inflammation of the domestic situation post-Sharm. It would be important to encourage the former course. Ambassador suggested the Iraqis should call the Egyptian President to keep lines of communication open. He also suggested the Iraqis should host the Jordanian Prime Minister as a way of expanding Iraq's relations with Arab states. By contrast, the Ambassador urged Iraq to maintain pressure on Syria to shut down terrorist training camps and police the Iraqi-Syrian border better. Abdel Mehdi agreed readily.

Armed Militias, Or Neighborhood Watch?

17. (C/NF REL GBR AUS) Abdel Mehdi highlighted that the main issue worrying the Shia now is security. He said the daily killing of Shia civilians could not go indefinitely without Shia retaliation. They cannot wait several years for the ISF to come into its own, he added. The Ambassador praised Shia restraint first. Abdel Mehdi said the Shia civilian population wants a role in protecting itself. Ambassador repeated U.S. opposition to militias. Instead, the U.S. wants to focus on building up the ISF. He noted that giving free rein to militias now might help an immediate security problem but lay the groundwork for big problems later. Abdel Mehdi did not push hard on militias; he conceded that Article 91 of the TAL abolished militias. He then proposed an unarmed "neighborhood watch" system. He said they could serve as informants for the ISF and would help keep the streets safe.

18. (U) REO Hillah, REO Basrah, REO Mosul, and REO Kirkuk, minimize considered.

Khalilzad